



Beryl Rawson
(1933–2010)

Source: Stuart Hay, ANU Photography.

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Beryl Rawson showed her academic promise early, winning a State government scholarship which covered the whole of her undergraduate studies at the University of Queensland, followed by a Fullbright travelling scholarship to the USA. Here she took her doctorate at Bryn Mawr College under the tutelage of the renowned ancient historian Lily Ross Taylor. This was an unusual move at this period for an Australian classicist – most contemporaries would have gone on to London or Oxbridge for further studies but not for a doctorate – but demonstrates Beryl's fierce independence of mind, which she never lost. For her doctorate she took up the study of the social conditions of the lower classes of Roman society, a topic quite unfashionable at the time, and one which ultimately led her into the study of the Roman family and childhood generally in the ancient Mediterranean world.

On her return from the United States she took up a lectureship in Classics at the University of Queensland and after three years there moved as Senior Lecturer to the Australian National University, where she remained for the rest of her academic career, becoming eventually Professor of Classics in 1989 and Head of Department (1989–97). She retired in 1998 but continued to work as a Visiting Fellow until shortly before her death after a quick illness. Beryl served the Faculty of Arts as Dean from 1981 until 1986, and was elected a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities in 2006.

Throughout this career Beryl worked steadily in carving out a new field of inquiry in ancient world studies, namely the difficult and complex field of Roman family studies. It is a field that demands expertise across a number of very disparate disciplines (ranging from epigraphy, art history, archaeology, philology, Roman law, statistics, to a number of the social sciences). In her three edited volumes she not only made major contributions herself, but also skilfully managed to attract specialist international scholars to contribute to these team projects. Each volume was carefully crafted around specific themes and each significantly moved forward the subject. All three volumes received enthusiastic reviews as major advancements in the field and

all three have gone into paperback editions. *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives* was published in 1986 and restricted itself to Rome of the late Republic and Early Empire. *Marriage, Divorce and Children in Ancient Rome* (1991), whilst still focusing on Rome, expanded the time scale to include the later Roman Empire, whereas *The Roman Family in Italy: Status, Sentiment, Space* (1997) further expanded the focus to cover Italy more generally. In her retirement she completed her major monograph *Children and Childhood in Ancient Rome* (2003; revised paperback 2005), which established Beryl as beyond doubt the leading international scholar in this field. Since this publication she worked steadily on editing *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*, a major project which Beryl was able to see through to proof stage before her death, and which expanded the coverage of her expertise to include the Greek as well as the Roman evidence for family life.

From the above brief summary it can be easily surmised that Beryl was a hard-working and conscientious academic, focused, always well prepared – and always on timetable. This applied to her not only as researcher, but also as teacher and administrator. She was always well informed, sharp-minded and thoroughly efficient – and expected others to conform to her own high standards. As such she could be somewhat unnerving, unable quite to conceal her displeasure at the failure of others to measure up to her own sense of what was required or of how things ought to be done. She could be unflinching in speaking her mind, whether this was in the affairs of the Australasian Society for Classical Studies (of which she was President from 1988 to 1989), the Australian Historical Association (of which she was President from 1991 to 1992) or on the Australian Research Council (where she served from 1991 to 1994 and was Chair of both the Small Grants Scheme Review Panel and the Research Training and Careers Committee). This made Beryl appear a somewhat private person but behind that carapace there was a person acutely sensitive to criticism (she never really forgave an old friend, Keith Hopkins, Professor of Ancient History at Cambridge, for his publicly rubbishing Family Studies as an academic endeavour) and one who took great pleasure in recognition – and in recent years the invitations to be a keynote speaker came thick and fast from abroad, to her obvious satisfaction. Earlier this year she agreed to be honoured by the ANU by having the administrative offices of the College of Arts and Social Sciences named the ‘Beryl Rawson Building’. And since the death of her second husband, the historian Allan Martin, despite appearances, she was a lonely person, missing the collegial company of a bygone era of university life to which she contributed much.

Graeme Clarke